

U.S. COAST GUARD CUTTER SORREL

(WLB 296

WAGL 296)

U.S. Coast Guard Buoy Tenders, 180' Cactus Class

Governors Island

New York County

New York

HAER No. NY-328

HAER

NY,

31-GOV1,

20-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

National Park Service

U.S. Department of the Interior

1849 C St. NW

Washington, DC 20240

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U.S. COAST GUARD CUTTER SORREL

HAER No. NY-328

HAER
NY,
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RIG/TYPE
OF CRAFT:

Cutter (Cactus Class)

TRADE:

Buoy tending (government)

OFFICIAL NUMBER:

WLB-296 (Former WAGL-296)

PRINCIPAL
DIMENSIONS:
(As built)

Length: 180'
Beam: 37'
Depth: 12'
Displacement: 935 tons

LOCATION:

Stockton, California

DATES OF
CONSTRUCTION:

May 26, 1942 - April 15, 1943

DESIGNER:

Preliminary design by U.S. Lighthouse Service. Interim design work by U.S. Coast Guard. Final design executed by Marine Iron and Shipbuilding Corporation of Duluth, Minnesota.

BUILDER:

Zenith Dredge Company of Duluth, Minnesota

PRESENT OWNER:

Sea Scouts of America, Stockton Chapter

PRESENT USE:

Sea Scout vessel

SIGNIFICANCE:

This vessel was built to serve as a 180' U.S. Coast Guard cutter. The federal government purchased or built thirty-nine of these vessels, built in three sub-classes, from 1942-1944. The U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) designed the 180s to service Aids-to-Navigation (AtoN), perform Search and Rescue missions (SAR), carry out Law Enforcement duties (LE), and conduct ice-breaking operations. Members of the class have served in the USCG from 1942 to the present. They have significantly contributed to safe navigation on inland and international waters in times of peace and war.

RESEARCHER: Marc Porter, 2002

PROJECT
INFORMATION:

This project is part of the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER), a long-range program to document historically significant engineering and industrial works in the United States. The HAER program is administered by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record Division (HABS/HAER) of the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, E. Blaine Cliver, Chief.

The U.S. Coast Guard Buoy Tenders, 180' Class Recording Project was sponsored by the U.S. Coast Guard, with Captain W. Patrick Lane, Chief, Office of Civil Engineering; Kebby Kelly, Environmental Officer; and Dr. Robert Browning, Historian serving as liaisons. The project was prepared under the direction of HAER Maritime Program Manager Todd Croteau. The historical report was produced by Marc Porter and edited by Justine Christianson, HAER Historian, NCSHPO.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON THE U.S. COAST GUARD BUOY TENDERS, 180' CACTUS CLASS, SEE:

HAER No. DC-57	U.S. Coast Guard Cutter, 180' Class
HAER No. DC-58	U.S. Coast Guard Cutter, 180' Cactus Class
HAER No. OR-114	U.S. Coast Guard Cutter COWSLIP
HAER No. AK-43	U.S. Coast Guard Cutter BALSAM
HAER No. OR-115	U.S. Coast Guard Cutter CACTUS
HAER No. MI-326	U.S. Coast Guard Cutter WOODBINE
HAER No. FL-15	U.S. Coast Guard Cutter GENTIAN
HAER No. FL-16	U.S. Coast Guard Cutter LAUREL
HAER No. CA-305	U.S. Coast Guard Cutter CLOVER
HAER No. CT-188	U.S. Coast Guard Cutter EVERGREEN
HAER No. NY-328	U.S. Coast Guard Cutter SORREL
HAER No. OR-116	U.S. Coast Guard Cutter CITRUS
HAER No. CA-306	U.S. Coast Guard Cutter CONIFER
HAER No. SC-36	U.S. Coast Guard Cutter MADRONA
HAER No. OR-117	U.S. Coast Guard Cutter TUPELO

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SORREL's keel was laid at the Zenith Dredge yard on May 26, 1942, and the vessel was launched an incredibly short time later, on September 28, 1942. It took only 125 days from the time construction began until the vessel slid down the ways. The U.S. Coast Guard commissioned her on April 15, 1943. SORREL's hull and machinery cost the federal government \$952,103, making her the most expensive of the A Class tenders.

The first months of the tender's career were spent breaking ice on the Great Lakes, an activity the seems almost a rite of passage for the 180s commissioned in the spring. New orders dispatched SORREL to the U.S. Coast Guard's Eighth District during the summer of 1943. SORREL spent a brief time operating out of Galveston, Texas before she headed for Boston, Massachusetts and duty under CINCLANT. Under naval direction SORREL spent time on Atlantic weather stations and conducting operations, namely ice breaking and patrol, in the waters around Greenland.

SORREL remained stationed in Boston in the years immediately following the war. In 1947 she began operating out of Rockland, Maine but her homeport reverted to Boston in 1948. SORREL's home port remained Boston until 1954. Throughout the years she worked the New England coast, SORREL's primary missions were AtoN and SAR with icebreaking as a secondary role. During this period she frequently operated for extended periods from a forward base in Argentia, Newfoundland.

In 1954 SORREL moved to Sitka, Alaska where she spent the next eleven years servicing AtoN in Alaskan waters. SORREL continued to participate in SAR missions as needed. Most of these efforts entailed assistance to fishing vessels and their crews, but SORREL was also involved in the aftermath of two commercial aviation accidents. On October 22, 1962, SORREL participated in the rescue effort that saved 102 persons from a DC-7 that ditched in Sitka Sound. Less than a year later, on June 5, 1963, the tender steamed to the site of a Northwest Orient Airlines crash. This time the efforts were less successful; the Coast Guard could not find any survivors.

From July 1965 to April 1973, SORREL operated out of Seward, Alaska and continued the same duties as before. From Seward, SORREL moved to Cordova, Alaska and continued her usual duties from this base until March 1976.

SORREL left Cordova for Curtis Bay, Maryland and a major renovation in the Coast Guard shipyard. Yard work on SORREL lasted until 1982, after which the tender took up station at Governors Island, New York and engaged in AtoN, SAR, and icebreaking work.

The Coast Guard decommissioned SORREL in June 1996. The federal government subsequently sold the vessel to a private owner who then resold the tender to the Stockton, California chapter of the Sea Scouts. She was renamed RELIANCE by the Sea Scouts. RELIANCE voyaged from the Curtis Bay yard to California via the Panama Canal in 2000. The

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Sea Scout organization uses RELIANCE as a training vessel for young people interested in maritime trades and activities. The new owners have overhauled the old tender's electronics suite and she now carries the same navigational equipment as a modern commercial ship.¹

¹ Bob French, interview by author, 4 March 2002, Washington, D.C.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

French, Bob. Interview by author, 4 March 2002, Washington, D.C.